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ABSTRACT

The Rufugee Education Project in Tucson, Arizona, supplemented its traditional group English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes for adult refugees with individualized ESL literacy instruction in August 1990. A $500 grant made possible the acquisition of a variety of literacy materials that could meet diverse student literacy needs. Fifty-three adult participants from Vietnam, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and Laos chose the following individual focuses of study: survival skills/English life skills; general interest; personal, creative writing; grammar skills; academic skills; computer skills; and other skill preferences or needs. Innovative aspects of the program include the student's ability to make individual choices, the variety of teaching/learning approaches, and a "workshop" atmosphere in the classroom. Volunteer recruitment and coordination is cited as the most critical contributor to the success of the program. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (LB)

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REPORT ON MPAEA INNOVATIVE GRANT PROJECT

Individualized ESL Literacy Instruction for Refugees

April 1991

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I. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

The Refugee Education Project supplemented its traditional group ESL classes for adult refugees with individualized ESL literacy instruction, starting in August 1990. The MPAEA Innovative Grant of $500 enabled the program to provide a variety of literacy materials to meet diverse student literacy needs. The goals of the program were to:

1) provide student-centered literacy instruction, tailored to the needs and interests of each student
2) encourage refugees to be more active, assertive participants in their education

During individual student/teacher conferences, students chose to focus on one of several areas of literacy study, according to their needs and preferences. Students could choose to change their area of focus at any time during their study. Fifty-three adult participants from the countries of Vietnam, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and Laos chose to focus their studies as follows:*

No. Students	Literacy Focus
25	**Survival Skills, English Life Skills:** bills, schedules, checks, signs, labels, etc.
20	**General Interest:** reading magazines, books, or newspapers on a variety of topics
4	**Personal, Creative Writing:** writing stories, letters, or poetry using students' own ideas and experiences
5	**Grammar Skills:** reviewing English grammar such as use of verb tenses, sentence structure, etc.
7	**Academic Skills:** practicing textbook reading, test-taking skills (TOEFL), critical thinking skills, essay writing
3	**Other preferences, needs:** vocational English, handwriting practice, listening comprehension practice
11	**Computer:** keyboard, word processing (Available 3 months after the start of the program.)

*Figures include changes students made in their area of focus.

After choosing an area of focus, students chose from a variety of materials suitable for individual work. Individualized instruction was provided by ESL instructors and/or trained ESL volunteers to help students with activities such as previewing materials, discussing instructions, asking questions, doing role plays, and checking written work as needed and requested by students.

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II. INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

1. Participants are encouraged to make their own choices and decisions concerning ESL literacy study. For refugees from very different cultures, having a participatory learning process can be an important part of the acculturation process.

2. The opportunity for each student to choose a focus for literacy work recognizes that there are various types of literacy and literacy needs. It is not assumed that all literacy students need basal readers, progressive grammar exercises or survival skills.

3. A variety of teaching/learning approaches and activities are used, depending on the needs and interests of each student.

4. The atmosphere in the room, which we called "the Workshop," is lively and interactive, with students and instructors sitting around tables talking and working with each other.

5. An authentic, enjoyable one-to-one rapport is established among students and staff. This program had a direct effect on morale. When the students evaluated this program, they gave the one-on-one attention their highest rating.

6. From an administrative perspective, restructuring an existing class schedule to include an individualized component is an innovative, effective way to meet the needs of a diverse and rapidly changing population. Since refugee funding has suffered cutbacks, this restructuring has been a tremendous help in meeting varied student needs more effectively with limited resources.

III. BENEFIT TO OTHER ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

1. Other programs might devise a similar program to supplement an existing program with student-centered, individualized instruction at a relatively low cost. The $500 grant purchased a variety of workbooks, periodicals and resource materials relevant to the interests of the students. Existing class time was restructured to include paid and volunteer staff facilitating individual instruction. Probably the most significant cost factor was the time required for volunteer coordination.

2. Other types of adult education programs can give students a similar smorgasbord of choices and activities. Depending on the student population, students can choose their own focus within the general areas of ESL, reading, writing, math, GED, computer literacy, etc.

3. Using one-on-one instruction can greatly build on student motivation, achievement, and overall morale. Students look forward to the time spent one-on-one and can get their own needs met more effectively.

4. Volunteer recruitment and coordination are perhaps the most critical components of the success of such a program. REP recruited many but not all of its volunteers through Pima Count Adult Education and through the local Volunteer Center. Considerable time was spent in orienting, training, coordinating and nurturing this valuable volunteer staff. Our retention of volunteers has been quite good because of the time invested in them. Continued training and opportunities for training need to be continually developed.

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